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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0640
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0625
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2167
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0972
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RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000321

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FOR THE WEEK OF MAY
3-7

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 315

[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 312

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: This week in Nouakchott the authorities surprised everybody by authorizing protests. Demonstrations were overall peaceful except for two incidents of violence by FNDD and RFD supporters against the journalist who published the Ould Daddah interview and an Aziz supporter. Mauritanian FNDD supporters occupied the Mauritanian Embassy in Paris and switched presidential portraits. The Senegalese declared themselves interested in continuing mediation efforts and extradited the leader of a drug-trafficking network to Mauritania. General Aziz became president of a new pro-coup party that many compare to President Taya's monolithic PRDS one-party system. The U.S. Embassy and FNDD were under verbal attack following RFD president Ahmed Ould Daddah's accusations of Embassy funding, and the FNDD responded by accusing French intelligence agents of interfering in Mauritanian politics through its "neo-colonial mafia." The AU's Peace and Security Council met to discuss Mauritania, while the UN Security Council issued a President Statement strongly condemning recent coup d'etats in Africa, including Mauritania's. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) FNDD and RFD mobilize for press freedom: On the occasion of International World Press Day on May 3, the FNDD and the RFD organized a joint protest in front of state-controlled TV Mauritania to denounce "the confiscation of public media by General Aziz." Police set up a security cordon in front of the building but did not repress the demonstration. The demonstration was covered in Al Jazeera's nightly "Maghreb Roundup" broadcast.

[1](#)3. (C) President Wade declares himself neutral and Senegalese mediation continues: At the May 2 opening of the first Inter-African Mauritanian - Senegalese Islamic Forum, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade denied that he had taken sides on the Mauritanian conflict. He stressed that he was on the side of the Mauritanian people and was disposed to helping Mauritania find a solution to the crisis. The Senegalese showed a willingness to continue negotiations (Ref A).

¶4. (U) Jean Ping issues press release: On April 30, President of the African Union Commission Jean Ping issued a statement saying that he "continues to closely monitor the Mauritanian situation." This release follows the visit to Nouakchott, two weeks ago, of Secretary Ali Triki, representative of the President of the African Union and the Commissioner for Peace and Security Ramtane Lamamra. In what many Mauritians perceive as a softening of the AU position, Ping stated that he "encourages Mauritanian actors to finalize bringing their positions closer through an inclusive gesture, respecting the country's constitution and animated by a sincere desire to find a consensual solution to the crisis."

¶5. (C) Senegal extradites drug dealer to Mauritania: On April 30, Senegalese authorities extradited to Nouakchott Megan Eric Walter (AKA Eric M'Benga), alleged leader of one of the biggest cocaine trafficking networks in the region. M'Benga's network included police officer Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya, a former Interpol agent in Mauritania. It is expected that M'Benga's testimony will shed light on the involvement of high-level Mauritanian officials in drug-trafficking. PolOff and PolAsst met with French Internal Security Officer Jean-Luc Peduzzi on May 4 to inquire about the extradition. Peduzzi stated that M'Benga, a French citizen, had outstanding arrest warrants in France for murder and in Mauritania for drug-trafficking. The French favored an extradition to Mauritania because the Mauritanian case was more solid. According to Peduzzi, General Aziz's willingness to cooperate in M'Benga's case is a sign that the junta is

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not involved in drug-trafficking. Comment: Given persistent rumors of Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall's involvement in the drug trade, if Peduzzi's hunch is true and Aziz is not involved in drug trafficking, this could be a way for him to weaken his biggest (and most powerful) rival. End comment.

¶6. (U) Mauritania excluded from the AU's North African military brigade: Algeria will have the first presidency of the North African force and Mauritania will not participate due to its unstable political situation.

¶7. (U) Demonstrations: May 4, the FNDD and RFD organized a march in the center of Nouakchott to protest the military's unilateral electoral agenda and call for an election boycott. The march was authorized by the Wali and police were present but did not repress it. The journalist who published the Ould Daddah interview after the RFD president denied his statements was threatened and beaten up in retaliation by RFD members. May 6, the FNDD and RFD youth organized a demonstration promising to boycott the election. An Aziz supporter was beaten up at the march.

¶8. (U) One thousand teachers expelled in 1989: According to the May 4 edition of "L'Authentique" newspaper, the Ministry of National Education finalized the census of Mauritanian teachers fired in 1989 during the purge of Afro-Mauritians from the administration and found that close to 1,000 teachers were expelled. This information still needs to be verified.

¶9. (U) U.S. "Activist Diplomacy" comes under fire: Following RFD President Ahmed Ould Daddah's statements accusing the U.S. Embassy of drafting the Coordination of Democratic Forces (CFD) Charter and offering financial support to the RFD for signing it, local media was full of articles condemning the U.S. for interfering in domestic matters and calling for Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins' expulsion (Ref B). The U.S. Embassy re-stated its position in a press release May 5 and denied the accusations. Looking at blog entries in the various Mauritania websites, the majority of respondents were generally supportive of the "principled" U.S. position against the coup. The more serious of those displeased with the U.S. position claimed that the U.S. was being inconsistent with its claimed intent

to be more open to dialogue in its foreign relations suggesting the U.S. should be more open to working with the coup leaders than condemnatory. President Abdallahi's spokesman told DCM that the President very much appreciated the Embassy's re-statement of its firm anti-coup position.

¶10. (SBU) FNDD denounces French interference and junta campaign: In a communique released May 5, the FNDD reacted to what it considers "a negative media campaign launched by the junta" against RFD President Ahmed Ould Daddah and the U.S. Embassy. The FNDD accused the French "neo-colonial mafia" -- referred to in French as "La Francafrique" -- of supporting the coup d'etat and sabotaging international community efforts to bring the country back to constitutional order. The communique was a source of conflict within the FNDD as Tawassoul president Jemil Ould Mansour said that it did not reflect the views of the FNDD, but of its sole drafter UFP president Mohamed Ould Maouloud. Note: FNDD communiques are typically circulated around the major constituent parties (e.g., Tawassoul, APP, UFP) for clearance before public release. Apparently, that did not happen this time, leading to Mansour's displeasure. As president of an islamist party that remains deeply critical of U.S. policy in the Middle East, Mansour may have been reluctant to go overboard in praising the U.S. At the same time, Tawassoul was the only FNDD party to quickly come out to deny charges the Embassy ad "created the CFD charter" stating that was their work. They also noted the long-term contributions of NDI to all parties over the years. End note.

¶11. (U) General Aziz becomes party president: The Union
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for the Republic (UPR) political party, which assembles pro-coup parliamentarians, elected Ould Abdel Aziz as interim president on May 5. Observers compared the UPR to Ould Taya's monolithic PRDS state party.

¶12. (U) Ghazouany in Sudan: According to press reports, junta number two and President of the High State Council General Ghazouany traveled to Sudan on May 4. The reasons for the trip are unclear; some media outlets claimed it was for a regional meeting of senior military commanders.

¶13. (U) Aziz's supporters buy votes among the poorest: Sebkha Senator and Mayor Dia Rabiyatou Haidara has given over one million ouguiya (approximately \$3,700) to womens' cooperatives that support General Aziz's candidacy. Another influential Aziz supporter gave the village of Douboungue one and a half tons of cement to finish construction of their mosque.

¶14. (SBU) Demonstrators occupy Mauritanian Embassy in Paris: According to various press sources, the Mauritanian Embassy in Paris was occupied by FNDD demonstrators on May 7. The demonstrators replaced General Aziz's portrait with President Abdallahi's and denounced the alleged support provided to the coup by Jean-Michel Antona. Note: Antona is a First Secretary in the French embassy in Nouakchott. According to local media outlets, he is also a member of the DGSE (French intelligence service), and a supposed "advisor" to Aziz. End note.

¶15. (C) AU Peace and Security Council meets and UN Security Council condemns coups in Africa: AU Peace and Security Council met May 6 and, according to State Department sources, it decided to send a delegation to Mauritania in the next few weeks. Comment: Mauritanian media announced at the beginning of the week the imminent arrival of a joint AU/Senegalese delegation headed by Ping himself and Gadio. These reports turned out to be false. End comment. On May 6, the UN Security Council issued a Presidential Statement condemning coups in Africa and welcoming the AU's strong condemnation of the coup in Mauritania.
BOULWARE